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E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/30/2008
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [KIRF](#) [PINR](#) [EG](#)
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR PRESSES PRIME MINISTER ON ARREST OF
"QURANIST"

REF: A. CAIRO 1938
[1](#)B. CAIRO 1855

Classified by Ambassador Francis J. Ricciardone for reason
1.5 (d).

[1](#)1. (C) In a meeting June 28 with Prime Minister Ahmed Nazif, the Ambassador emphasized USG concerns that Amr Tharwat's imprisonment was inconsistent with the Egyptian constitutional guarantee of free worship and could pose difficulties for bilateral relations. Ambassador noted that Tharwat, a member of the "Quranist" movement, is an employee of the USG-supported Ibn Khaldun Center, headed by democracy activist Saad Eddin Ibrahim (SEI).

[1](#)2. (C) Nazif appeared unaware of the Tharwat case, although the Charge had raised USG concerns about the case twice in recent weeks with the Foreign Ministry (ref A). Clearly missing the point of USG concerns, Nazif responded that Egypt allows widespread criticism of the President in newspapers and television but that the law does not allow criticism of religion. "Our culture has high Islamic content, more than I would like. I get upset when I see all of these women in veils, but you have to accept it and slowly get some to change."

[1](#)3. (C) Ambassador pushed back, noting that Tharwat had been held for two weeks without charges and that he appeared simply to be exercising his right of religious freedom under the Egyptian constitution. Ambassador also noted that Tharwat, along with the Ibn Khaldun Center and SEI, were the targets of an increased smear campaign by the government-backed media and politicians, evidently for SEI's attendance at President Bush's June 5 Prague speech and reported remarks to President Bush (ref B).

[1](#)4. (U) Septels report other issues raised by Ambassador and A/S Welch.
RICCIARDONE